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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000075

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BASRAH DEPUTY GOVERNOR ON SECURITY SITUATION, ELECTIONS LAW,
REGIONS FORMATION

REF: BAGHDAD 2474

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ramon Negrón, Director, Regional Embassy Office
Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Governor Luay al-Battat voiced concern August 25 about the recent uptick in violence in Basrah, attributing it to the return of Special Group members from Iran. Battat said the mood among Basrawis had grown tense and fearful in recent weeks. On the failure to pass the Provincial Elections Law, Battat said the people of Basrah are anxious for change because they are frustrated with the inefficacy and corruption of their local government. Unable to mask his disdain for Governor Wa'ili, Battat was extremely critical of Wa'ili's campaign to move forward on the Regions Formation Law, claiming the push lacked popular support and constituted an abuse of power. Despite his opposition to Wa'ili's plan, Battat readily admitted his support for a three-region province composed of Maysan, Thi Qar, and Basrah, holding up the Kurdish Regional Government as a model for his proposed region. End Summary.

Uptick in Violence Worrisome

¶2. (C) In an August 25 meeting at the Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Basrah Deputy Governor Luay al-Battat acknowledged dramatic security gains following the springtime Charge of the Knights (CoK) operation, but worried that the recent uptick in violence may signal a return to the kind of violence that marred Basrah prior to the CoK. Alleging that Special Group members have started trickling back into the province from Iran, Battat pointed to several recent attacks and assassinations as proof that they have begun to reestablish themselves. Visibly concerned, Battat said that the mood on the street was gradually changing and that there was a palpable feeling of tension among the population.

¶3. (C) Though he praised the role played by the Iraqi Army (IA) in restoring security, Battat claimed that their performance and morale has decreased, and now they often appeared to be going through the motions when conducting security operations and manning checkpoints. Though he asserted that their performance was still much better than that of the Iraqi Police (IP), Battat said that the IA needed to step up operations to counter the spike in violence in recent weeks. He also insisted the IP needed to be thoroughly purged of rogue elements. Though he acknowledged that a considerable number of officers were removed in the immediate aftermath of the CoK operation, he thought much more was needed.

Desire for Elections Grows

¶4. (C) Expressing disappointment with the failure of the Council of Representatives (CoR) to pass the Provincial Elections Law, Battat asserted that Basrawis had grown increasingly frustrated and contemptuous of local government officials and were anxious for change. According to Battat, in the three years since the current Provincial Council (PC) was elected, Basrawis have seen no real improvement in their daily lives, apart from security gains made after the CoK operation. Yet, though the people desire change, Battat said that the sitting members of the Provincial Council (PC) seemed unperturbed by the delay, since they fear that they will be voted out of office when new elections are held. Battat also optimistically predicted that independent parties would do well in the next provincial elections.

"No To Separate Basrah Region"... "3-Province Region Better"

¶5. (C) Scoffing at Governor Wa'ili's decision to move forward on the Regions Formation Law, with the ultimate goal being the creation of a separate federal region in Basrah, Battat said there was very little support for the governor's plan and predicted that it would ultimately fail. Moreover, Battat alleged that the governor's signature-gathering campaign was illegal (Note: Governor Wa'ili has freely acknowledged that his cousin, former Basrah governor and current CoR member Wa'il Abd al-Latif, has created an organization to lead a signature gathering campaign in support of a Basrah region. See Reftel Baghdad ¶2474. End Note). When told by Poloff that under the Regions Formation Law, a referendum for region formation can be called for by one-tenth of a province's voters, and conducting a signature-gathering campaign itself was not

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illegal, Battat backtracked, claiming that it still constituted an abuse of power by the governor. Yet, despite his opposition to Wa'ili's plan, Battat freely admitted that he supported the creation of a 3-province southern region, comprising Basrah, Maysan, and Thi Qar. Positing that this would be a more viable option, Battat said that he saw the Kurdish Regional Government as a model worthy of emulation for Basrah.

Comment: Consistent Anxieties but Security Gains Remain

¶6. (C) Comment: Battat's claims about the security situation have been echoed by other REO contacts and should not be discounted. In the last several weeks, there have been several attacks against government, political, and religious officials, which many have attributed to Special Group elements. Though it is unlikely that Basrah will return to the violence and lawlessness that previously plagued the city, these attacks may herald the beginning of a new campaign of terror and intimidation. While it is unlikely that such a campaign would seriously threaten most security gains made after the CoK operation, it could prove devastating to economic reconstruction efforts and to the promotion of sorely needed investment in Basrah.

Will Delayed Elections Build Momentum for Region Formation?

¶7. (C) Comment (con't): Battat's open support for a three-province region, which is shared by other REO contacts, indicate that support for this issue is gaining steam among the Basrah political elite. The failure to date of the CoR to pass the Provincial Elections Law may lead to more support for region formation, as many local politicians and citizens remain frustrated by the perceived inefficacy and corruption of the Basrah PC and could rally

around the creation of a Basrah region as an alternative
vehicle for change. End Comment.
NEGRON